

The Power of Charity to Cover SIN.

A
SERMON

Preach'd before the
President and Governors
Of the HOSPITALS of
Bridewell and Bethlehem,
IN
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AUGUST 16. 1694.

I St. PETER IV. 8.
Charity shall Cover the multitude of Sins.

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L O N D O N :

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1 St. *PETER* IV. 8.

Charity shall Cover the multitude of Sins.

GOD be thanked, the frequent Returns of such Pious Meetings as these, in this Rich and Charitable CITY, have made the General Argument of CHARITY, the Nature and Chief Properties, the several Grounds and Reasons of this Duty so well understood, that, to Entertain you with a Discourse at large on that Subject, would be a very needless and useless attempt. So many Eminent Persons have gone before, in This Way, as have left it very difficult for those who come after either to say any thing which They have not said, or not to say That much worse, which They have.

Upon This Account ; and because, indeed, I take general Discourses, for the most part, to be like Large Prospects, where the Eye is lost by the wide Compass it takes, and sees so many things at once, that it sees nothing distinctly ; I have chosen at present to point your Thoughts only on One Particular Property of this Great Vertue, which hath been not often handled, I think, and even Then, not always well understood : It is That which the Apostle St. Peter proposeth to Us in those few words I have read to you ——— *Charity shall Cover the multitude of Sins.*

Few as they are, they will sufficiently employ our Thoughts at this time, if we consider, in the

I. *First* place, the several Explications that have been given of them, and satisfy our selves, which of These ought to take place. It,

II. *Secondly*, We free That One True Genuine Meaning of the Words from the Exceptions which lye against it. If,

III. *Thirdly*, We establish the Truth laid down upon Proper Grounds and Reasons. And if,

IV. *Fourthly*, We make some few useful Destructions from

V. After this is done, the little Time that is left will properly be spent in Applying what hath been said more immediately to the Occasion of this Present Assembly.

I. *Charity shall Cover the multitude of Sins.*

There is scarce any man, I believe, who hears these Words

that is not ready to frame to himself This Sense of them ; * That the Vertue of *Charity* is of so great price in the Sight of God, that Those Persons, who possess and exercise it in any Eminent manner, are peculiarly Entitled to the Divine Favour and Pardon, with regard to numberless Slips and Failings in their Duty, which they may be Otherwise guilty of : this Great Christian Perfection, of which they are Masters, shall make many Little Imperfections to be over-look'd and unobserv'd ; it shall *Cover the multitude of Sins*.

This, I say, is the account, which every man naturally gives himself of these Words, at his first hearing them ; and it is for that very Reason probable, that This is the True and Genuine account of them. For, supposing the Original Text to be well and clearly render'd in our Version, it will, I am of opinion, be found, that That Sense of any Passage, which, after attending to the Force of the Words, and to their Coherence with what goes before, and what follows, First occurs to the Mind, is generally the Justest and Truest.

This hath not however been always thought a Good Rule in the present Case. For several Pious, and some Judicious men, finding the Words, in their plain and familiar meaning, to carry somewhat of a suspicious sound with them, and to border a little (as They Thought) on the Papal Doctrine of *Works Meritorious*, have, therefore, taken some Pains to give a Different Interpretation of them. I shall offer, first, to your view some of these mistaken Senses, e'er I come to consider That which, I think, was intended by *St. Peter* ; because Each of these doth certainly propose a Clear and Apposite Truth to us, tho' perhaps not truly drawn from the Passage now before us.

First, then the Words have been understood to contain an account of that particular Instance of Charity, which we call *Good-Nature* : by which we pass by little Sights and Injuries, interpret things in the Best sense, are not apt to take, or return an Affront, not forward to publish, or believe an ill Report of any One : by which we turn our eyes always toward the best side of a man, and chuse rather to look on his Vertues, than his Failures ; and by which we constantly interpose our Good Offices, wherever, we thing, they may be Serviceable, either to the composing Old Differences, or preventing New ones.

And This Sense is grounded upon a supposed Relation there is between these Words in *St. Peter*, and Those in the *Proverbs* ; *Hate stirreth up strife, but Love covereth all Sins*. Prov. 10. 12. Now, tho' indeed, in our Translation, there is some Similitude between the words of the Text, and this Passages in the *Proverbs* : yet as it lyes in the Septuagint Version (which the Apostles made use of,) it bears no such Resemblance of the Text as may make it probable that the One ought to be expounded by the Other. On the contrary it deserves observation, that, where ever the Greek Phrase *, which is here translated by *Covering Sin*, occurs in Scripture, it constantly † signifies

* καλυπτεν
ἀμαρτίας.

† See Ps. 84. 1.
Ps. 32. 1. and
Nehem. 4. 5.

that Pardon of Sin which proceeds from God, not any Instances of Good Nature and Forgiveness exercised by Men.

We may farther observe, that This Sense of the Words is by no means full enough to bear the Weight of that emphatic and solemn Preface with which the Apostle introduces them; *but above all things* (says He, in the Words immediately before the Text) *have fervent Charity among yourselves: for Charity shall Cover the multitude of Sins.* ΕΥΤΕΡΗ ΑΥΤΟΜΕΛΕ intense, or fervent Charity must signifie somewhat more than the bare Acts and Offices of Good-Nature. If they, to whom the Apostle wrote were *above all things* to have *fervent Charity* among themselves, it could not be for This Reason, because Charity would render them inoffensive towards Others, and not easie to be offended Themselves. For tho' This be a commendable Degree of Vertue, and very fit to be enjoy'd, because not frequently practis'd; yet can it not deserve that peculiar Emphasis and Stress which is here laid upon it. Especially, if we consider it as exceeding the mention of those more important and necessary Duties, to which the Apostle exhorts them in the preceding Verse, the *being sober and watching unto Prayer*: Above all which, it cannot be suppos'd, that the Duty of conversing with one another according to the Rules of Good Nature and Gentleness should be enjoy'd.

The Words, therefore, have in the Second place, been thus also interpreted. *Charity shall Cover the multitude of Sins*, that is, says the excellent Grotius, it will have a mighty Influence towards reclaiming Sinners from the Error of their Ways; the Consequence of which is, That the Sins of Men thus reclaim'd, are pardon'd, or cover'd. Charity, which is an exalted Love of God and our Neighbour, will make us industrious in procuring Glory to the One, by the Salvation of the Other. It will create a mighty Zeal for the Interests of Vertue, and the Honour of the Gospel and the Good of Souls; and it will run through all the Difficulties that lie in the way towards so good an End, with Readiness and Pleasure. It will not be frighten'd from making Attempts even on Those of the first Rank in Wickedness, the most Hardened of Men, because it knows, that Their Revolt from Sin to Vertue (if it can be compass'd) will be of mighty Consequence to Religion, and will probably draw whole Troops of Common Sinners along with it: The Sense they have of their Own Sins being cover'd, will make Them also eager, in their turn, to cover those of Other Men.

This is a very Good and Pious Sense of the Words, but (I believe, will be allow'd me) no very Easie and Natural One: they must be rack'd e'er they can be brought to confess This Meaning. However it was when that Learned Person was led into by a former Explication he had made in a Parallel place in St. James; which I shall crave leave to produce at length, and to comment upon, because I take it to be the Key of the Text which easily and readily lets us into the True sense of it. Brethren (says St. James, at the Conclusion of his Epistle) *if any One of you do Err from the Truth, and One Convert him, let him know, that he which converteth*

shall save a Sinner from the Errour of his ways, shall save a Soul from Death, and shall hide a Multitude of Sins, James 5. 19, 20. He intended to shut up his Epistle with recommending to them One of the most important and useful Vertues, That of endeavouring the Conversion and Reformation of Men. And he intended also to stir them up to the exercise of this Vertue by the most powerful Motives he could propose: What are they? Why, first, That He who converteth a Sinner from the Errour of his ways, should consider, that he *save* a Soul from Death; and then, secondly, and chiefly, that he *shall* [also] *cover* a multitude of Sins. Whose Sins? Those of the Converted Person? Nay, but That was already said and much more than that in the foregoing Motive, *He shall save a Soul from Death*: or surely the saving a Soul from Death, necessarily includes and presupposes the Remission of it's Sins. It must then be meant of His Sins who makes, and not of His who becomes, the Convert: And Thus indeed this last Clause carries a New Motive in it, distinct from That in the Former; and such an One as riseth beyond it, and more sensibly toucheth those to whom it is address'd; and was therefore fit to be propos'd in the Last place, and to be left, as a Sting, in their Minds. 'Tis as if St. James had said more at length, 'Let such an own-know, that He shall, by This Means, not only save a Soul from Death, (I thought This it self be a very Great and Desirable Thing) but shall also (which more nearly concerns him) secure to himself on this account the Pardon of many Sins.

Now the Words of St. James here explain'd, are exactly the same with those of St. Peter, in my Text; and the Occasion upon which they are introduc'd, and their dependence on the Context is much the same in both Places; except only that they are used in my Text as a Motive to Charity in general, but in St. James, with regard only to One main and eminent Branch of it, the Conversion of Souls: What therefore St. James means by them, is meant also by St. Peter: and, consequently, that most Obvious and Easie Sense, which I mention'd at the Entrance of this Discourse, is, in all probability, the Truest: And, as such, I shall take the liberty here once again to repeat it. It is This, 'That the Vertue of Charity is of so great price in the sight of God, that They, who possess and exercise it in any Eminent Manner, are peculiarly entitl'd to the Divine Favour and Pardon, with regard to numberless Slips and Failings in their Duty, which they may be Otherwise guilty of. This great Christian Perfection, of which they are Masters, shall make many little Imperfections to be overlook'd and unobserv'd; It shall Cover the multitude of Sins.

Nor are there wanting Parallel Places in other parts of Holy Writ, which confirm this Interpretation of the Words, and the Doctrine contain'd in it. For, besides those Passages in the Apocryphal Writers, which directly affirm that *Alms shall purge away Sin*, Tob. 12. 9. and that *As Water quenbeth Flaming Fire, so Alms maketh an Atonement for Sins*; Ecclef. 3. 30. there are in the Books of Proverbs and Daniel, two Texts, very expresse to this purpose: In the first of these *Wise Man* declares, that *Mercy and Truth Iniquity is purged*; Prov. 16. 6. and in the latter the

Prophet counsels *Nebuchadnezzar*, to *break of his Sins by Righteousness* Dan. 4. 27. (or rather, as it is in all the Ancient Versions, to redeem his Sins by Alms-deeds) and his Iniquities by shewing Mercy to the Poor. And were it proper in this Place to vouch the Testimony of the Earliest Writers of the Church, it were easie to produce, from their Works, Passages without Number, wherein they speak the same Language.

I fear I have been tedious in settling the *Sense of the Words*: but it is no more than was requisite, in so important a Point, so little insisted on from the Pulpit; and which may be thought liable to some just *Exceptions*.

II. *These* I am now, in the *Second Place*, to propose, and shall endeavour to remove. The doing of which will give me an Occasion of clearing the Sense, and limiting the Bounds of this Truth more exactly and fully.

The *First* and Great Exception against This way of Expounding the Text is, that it gives too great a Colour to the Popish Doctrines of *Mercy* and *Supererogation*; and seems to lessen the Worth of that only True and Proper Satisfaction for Sin, made by our Saviour on the Cross. For, at this Rate, what need of Remission of Sin in Every Case by the Blood of Christ, since We our selves are in Good Measure capable of making the Atonement? We, who have it, it seems, in our power, by the Exercise of one Particular Virtue to secure a Pardon to our selves for Neglecting the Rest; and can blot out the Remembrance of an Ill spent Life, by a few Acts of Charity at the Close of it? As if God were so much beholden to us for our Good Deeds, as to be bound for Their sakes to forgive our Ill-Ones! Or, as if the Performance of Our Duty in One Case, could make any manner of Amends to Him for our Nonperformance of it in another! This, say They, is very Easie and Comfortable Divinity!

To take off the Force of This Objection, it will be requisite to reflect a little on these following Considerations. And,

1st, We must Explain our selves a little more particularly, what is to be understood by that *Charity*, to which the Promise of the Text is made. What it is in the *Nature* and *Extent*, add what in the *Intention* and *Degree* of it.

As to its *Nature* and *Extent*, it must be understood to signify not barely *Acts of Relief* to the Poor and Needy, as the Vulgar and Confined Use of the Word imports; but, more largely, all the several ways of *Universal Beneficence* and *Kindness*, by which one Man can be serviceable to another. Farther, it expresses not the *Outward Material Act* only, but must be suppos'd to take in also the *Vital Form* of it, that *Inward Principle* of a *Sincere Love* towards God and Man, from whence it regularly flows; and separated from which, the meer external Act is a Lifeless and Useless Performance. And Then, even of Charity thus Largely understood it is not a *Common Degree* that is meant here; 'Tis to an Intense or fervent Charity, to a mighty and extraordinary measure of it, that the mighty and extraordinary Blessing is expressly said to belong.

2^{dly}, Even of this Exalted Degree of Charity it is not said, that it shall

over all manner of Transgressions, how Gross and Heinous soever ; The Words of the Text do by no means carry us to assert thus much concerning it : but only (as You have heard them Explain'd to You) seem to say, that it shall be our Excuse for many Lesser Neglects and Failings in our Duty, many Sins of Infirmary, Surprize, and Daily Incurfion ; which are properly enough styl'd *the multitude of Sins* : It shall Cover such Offences only, as are consistent with a state of True Charity ; and surely Those cannot be very Gross and Presumptuous. For He, who lives in the Perfect Exercise of that Fervent Charity, which the Text recommends, abounding Inwardly and Outwardly in all the various Instances and Expressions of it, and in those several Vertues and Graces which do naturally attend it : I say, who ever he is, that is thoroughly possess'd and acted by this Divine Principle of Love, cannot be suppos'd capable of committing any Heinous Sins, whilst he is under the Guidance of it : And as for Those, which he had fallen into before the attainment of this Gift, They were certainly remitted also and cover'd, before the attainment of it ; else, doubtless, he had never attain'd it. So that no Great Guilt of any kind can well be thought to harbour in that Breast, where true Charity dwells.

Indeed, it is not universally certain, that, when-ever God remits the Guilt of Sin, he remits the Punishment too (the Temporal Punishment, I mean :) for Wicked Men, upon their Return to Vertue, do not seldom find, to their Cost, that a Sin may be pardon'd, and yet all the Ill Consequences of it not prevented ; and they can, therefore, often trace the Steps of their Former Misdoings, in the several Evils of Life that afterward befall them. And in This Sense, therefore, it may be, and is probably true, that Charity shall cover many Sins, even of the first Magnitude ; i. e. it shall prevent the Temporal Indictions due to them, and often, even after Pardon obtain'd, pursuing the Committers of them : But it contributes to a removal of the Guilt only of such Faults and Infirmities of a lesser size, as may be thought consistent with a state of Charity. And therefore, to except against the Doctrine laid down, as encouraging the Charitable Man to expect Remission of all manner of Sins, how great and how numerous soever, is to load it with a Difficulty which doth no ways belong to it. But

3dly, Even as to these slighter Omissions and Failings, it is not pretended, that they are cover'd by Acts of Mercy and Charity in any sense, but what includes the Application of the Merits of our Saviour's Blood, the only Fountain of Satisfaction for all Kind of Sins, for the Least as well as the Greatest. It is true indeed, and granted, that the Blood of Christ alone can expiate Sin : However, this hinders not but that God may make such and such Acts of Ours the Conditions and Grounds (as it were) of applying the Virtue of that Blood to us. And thus Our Good Works, tho' they are not the Meritorious, yet may become, if I may so speak, the Occasional Cause of Pardon and Grace to us. And if This be establishing the Popish Doctrine of Salvation by Works, then hath our Saviour Himself, I fear, establish'd it, in that Divine Form of Prayer, in which he hath taught

us to say, *Forgive Us Our Trespases, as We forgive Those that Trespase against Us: As We forgive Those!* i. e. *Inasmuch as*, on That very account (among Others) *because*, we forgive Those that trespass against Us. Where, we see, the Exercise of one great Instance of Charity, Forgiveness of Enemies, is made the Ground of our asking and expecting Forgiveness from God.

ably and Lastly, It follows not, that because so Vast a Recompence is promis'd to a Fervent Charity, therefore the Exercise of it is in the way of *Supererogation*, so that we might have let it alone without Fault or Blame. We may be strictly, and by the very Letter of the Law, oblig'd to it; and yet it may include so high a pitch of perfection, and one so seldom attain'd, that God may think fit, where ever it is attain'd, mightily to reward it; and to encourage us towards doing our Duty in some One Great Point, by an assurance, that in many smaller Instances he will not be *Extream to mark what is done amiss* by us. Our Gracious Master deals with Us in This Case, as a Man oftentimes doth with his Servant; If he be Trusty and Faithful to him in a Business of Great Concern and Moment, tho' his Duty bound him to be so, yet shall That piece of Eminent Service excuse a Thousand Neglects and Failings upon Other Occasions.

There is yet a *Second Objection*, tho' indeed so slight an One, as, after the Former hath been remov'd, is scarce worth mentioning. It is taken from that Saying of our Lord, That They *will* Love much, to whom much *hath been* forgiven. *Contrary* to which the Text, as here expounded, seems to affirm, that They who *do* love much, *shall* have much Forgiven them. But these two Truths are easily reconcil'd. For it is not hard to understand, how That, which is the *Cause* of a thing in One Respect, may be the *Effect* of it in another. And accordingly, it may be very true, that He, who is Forgiven much, will, for that very reason, Love much: And it may be as True, that He, who thus Loveth much, because much hath been Forgiven him, shall, on that very account, have much more Forgiven him. 'Tis just the same Case as between Me and my Friend. I may passionately love him, because he hath pardon'd me the Great and many Injuries I formerly did him, while we were at Variance: And again, the Knowledge he hath of my Love may incline him to pass over any Future Mistakes and Miscarriages, whereby I may happen to offend him.

III. The Doctrine being thus fix'd, and freed from Exception; I go on, as I propos'd, in the *Third* place, to enquire into the *Grounds and Reasons* of this Wondrous Efficacy, so particularly attributed to the Exercise of Charity: for we read not that God hath annex'd this Promise to any Other Grace, or Vertue of the Christian Life whatsoever, but to This only, that it *shall cover Sin*; of which these several Accents may, with some Probability, be given.

1st, That it was really more fit and proper that such a Return as this should be made to Charity, than to any Other Vertue; because it adjusts and proportions the Reward of Acting to the Act it self; and makes the Duty of Man towards God, and the Blessing of God upon the Performance

of that Duty, to have a near Relation and Resemblance to each other. I explain my self in this manner : The chief Employment, the highest Point and Perfection of *Charity* is, to pass by the Offences and Injuries of Men ; to pardon the Malice of our Enemies, and the Ingratitude of our Friends. To him therefore who advances to this Height of Virtue, God hath very *aptly* and *suitably* promis'd, that his Faults and Offences too shall be pardon'd : as he deals with his Neighbour, so will God deal with him: Mercy shall be shew'd upon him, who shews Mercy : If we forgive *other* Men *their* Trespases, then will our Heavenly Father forgive *us* *our* Trespases also. There is, you see, a strict Analogy betwixt the Reward annex'd, and one great Instance of the Virtue enjoin'd : which is God's method of *putting* us in mind of what we are to do, by his Promises as well as his Commands ; and of exciting us to endeavour after a Perfection, not easily *attained*, by assuring us, that the Exercise of it shall, in the very same kind, return doubly and richly into our own Bosom. But,

2dly, The Good and Charitable Man is peculiarly entituled to the Pardon of many Sins, because he is in a peculiar manner liable to incur the Guilt of many ; either from the *Natural Frame and Make* of his Mind, which disposes him to this Virtue, or from the very *Exercise* of the Virtue it self.

Charity is grafted always on Good Nature, and a Sweetness of Disposition : which though it be a Temper of Mind very lovely and desirable ; yet is it such as, in the Circumstances of our present Imperfect State, hath its Inconveniencies ; and is what makes Conversation dangerous in a World, where we are surrounded with Temptations. It hinders us from arming our selves with that obstinate Resolution of Mind, that stubborn incomplying Virtue, which is requisite to preserve a Man undelid and blameless. It makes us easie and yielding to Common Customs, and Receiv'd Opinions ; Ready to comply with a Thousand Things (of which we are not exactly well satisfied) upon the pure score of good Nature, and because we cannot allow our selves to be troublesome. And being found and known to be of thi Easie and Complying Temper ; this very thing will invite Ill Spirits, and Ill Men, to make their Attempts upon us.

And then the *Exercise* of the Virtue it self, especially where the Principle of it is strong, lays us open to several Failings. It makes us omit oftentimes the Duties Incumbent on us from our Professions and Callings ; and perhaps neglect to take care of Those, whom it is the First Point of Charity to take care of, our Children and Families. It warms us with such a Zeal for doing Good, as breaks out sometimes into Acts, not reconcileable to the Rules of Discretion, Decency and Right Reason ; and which do real disservice to the Cause of God and Religion, instead of promoting it. *St. Francis's* Charity went a little too far, when it was taken up in providing for Birds, and Beasts, after a most Extraordinary and singular manner : the Virtue was not at all beholding to him for being shew'd

shew'd in such a Dress, as, insteasd of rendring it desirable in the Eyes of Men, made it look ridiculous.

Indeed Love (the Spring Head of Charity) as it is the sweetest of All Passions, so is one of the strongest too; and, if it have the Reins but once given to it, will go near to run away with its Rider: that is, if a due Care be not taken of it, it will exalt our Fancy so high, and disorder it so much, as to put it out of the Reach and Rule of the Governing Powers of the Mind. And then what wild Work doth there follow! Instead of Wise and Rational Ways of Beneficence, foolish Undertakings, and impracticable Designs! Instead of a manly and sober Form of Devotion, all the extravagant Rants and silly Freaks of Enthusiasm! For the Proof of which I appeal to the Lives of many of those Saints to whom the Church of *Rome* hath allow'd a place in her Calendar!

Finally, the Charitable Man, who loves every thing, doth not fail sometimes to love his own Vertue too; I mean, that he is apt to over-rate the just Price of it, and too much to undervalue every thing else in comparison of it. A Man may be so much struck with the Beauty and Excellence of Charity, as to be less concern'd than he ought to be for a sound Faith, and make Shipwrack of the One, whilst he is too hastily and zealously pursuing the Other.

Thus, I say, the Good and Merciful Man, being particularly liable to some Infirmities, is as particularly comforted with a gracious Assurance of their Pardon.

3dly, God seems on purpose to have plac'd this Mark of Distinction upon Charity, to shew us, how tender and careful He is of Our Welfare; what Bowels of Love and Compassion he hath for us: Since That is His Favourite Vertue, the Vertue he chiefly delights in, and delights to reward; the Exercise of which is most sweet and comfortable, most useful and advantageous to the Sons of Men. He design'd, by This convincing Instance of his Goodness to prove to us, that he was not an hard and rigorous Master, who enjoin'd us Commands, for his own sake, and purely for the pleasure of being Obey'd; but that his great Intention was, to twist our Duty and our Happiness together: And therefore, the more our Ease and Advantage was concerned in the Practice of any Vertue, the stronger Tyes and Engagements to it was he resolv'd to lay upon us.

4thly, Charity is particularly available to procure a Remission of the Guilt of Sin, and a Relaxation of the Punishment due to it; because it particularly engages in our behalf the Prayers of all Good Men, and of all Those Persons to whom the Instances of our Goodness extend. A Kind and Beneficent Man, as He is a common Blessing to the World, so is He blest by all Mankind that know him: All are ready to Implore the Mercies of God, Spiritual and Temporal, upon the Merciful-minded; especially the Poor and Miserable, (whose Prayers God hath in a particular manner promised to hear) are constant and earnest Intercessors at the Throne of

Grac

Grace for him. So that, whereas the Possessors of Others Vertues stand chiefly upon their Own Bottom for the obtaining Pardon and Grace, every Man almost becomes a Supplicant for the Merciful and Liberal: and no wonder, therefore, if such United Requests prevail. But,

1stly, and principally, God hath made This Promise to *Charity*, and to no other Vertue, because it is really the chief and most Excellent of Vertues; and the most Excellent Thing ought to have the most Excellent Reward. It is the great Perfection, the distinguishing Grace of a Christian, preferable to Faith and Hope, in Dignity, in Use, and in the Length of its Duration, as *St. Paul* hath taught us to reason concerning it. It is call'd the *Great Commandment*, *Matth. 22. 38.* the *End of the Commandment*, *1 Tim. 1. 5.* and the *Fulfilling of the Law*, *Rom. 13. 10.* and it is really what it is called. For where this Divine Grace dwells, and reigns, there no Moral Attainment of any kind can be totally wanting.

Charity is the Queen of Vertues*; the rest are of Her Retinue, and Train, as it were; constantly attending on Her, appearing, and disappearing with Her: and well, therefore, as a Queen, is she invested by God with that Sovereign Prerogative, the Power of covering Sin. It is Her Nature to be comprehensive of, and abounding in many Duties; and therefore it is Her Reward also, to be a Skreen for many Failings. *Charity* is said in Scripture to establish a True Friendship, and to create a real Likeness between God and Man: God passeth by the Faults, therefore, of the Charitable, as a Friend doth those of his Friend; the great Resemblance of the Divine Nature, which shines out in him, hides every lesser Sort and Degree of Unlikeness, and makes it not to be discern'd.

'Tis difficult to stop on so fruitful a Subject; and yet more difficult to express one's self becomingly and well. The Tongues of Men and Angels, as they are said to be a worthless Gift, in comparison of *Charity*, so are they not All able to set out half the worth and Excellence of it. *St. Paul* hath done something towards it, in the XIIIth Chapter of the First Epistle to the *Corinthians*; and to Him I refer you.

IV. It remains, that I should make those few *Inferences* I intended from the Whole, and then point all that hath been said particularly upon the Occasion of this present Assembly. And,

1st, The Truth, which hath been explain'd, suggests to us one Argument against their Opinion, who hold *Justification*, and all the Graces of the Gospel to be convey'd to us by *Faith alone*; in such a sense as excludes any manner of regard to our *Works*. For if *Justification* be the putting a Man into a state of Favour with God by Remission of Sin, then *Works of Charity* which contribute to the Remission of our Sins, must contribute also to our *Justification*. This Point goes generally for a *Speculative Nicety*, not worth insisting upon: But surely they, who think it so, have not well consider'd what Influence it hath experimentally had upon *Practice* and a good Life, in many of its Assertors. Some Spiritual Libertines, of the *Antinomian* Way, have by it undermin'd the very Design of the Gospel; and

* βασιλὶς ἡ ἀρετῶν.
Chrys. Tom. vi.
p. 193.

and set us free from the Necessity of being Pious, Just, or Good, upon any other Principle, but that of pure *Gratitude* only. And in those who do not rise to these mad Heights, yet the Persuasions they have entertain'd about Justifying Faith, are observed mightily to lessen their Esteem of good Works: and from esteeming them less, to come to practise them less, is, God knows, a very easie Step, and almost an unavoidable one! Witness the celebrated *Institutions* of a great Divine, in which of *Faith* much every where, of *Charity* little any where is spoken; and we are not therefore to wonder, if the Rules of Charity should in that Book be a little observ'd. Indeed these very rules of Charity (which I would not willingly, while I am mentioning, transgress) induce me to think, That many Learned and Pious Men hold this Doctrine of Justification by Faith alone, in its most rigid Sense, without holding, or even discerning the ill Consequences that attend it. However, since the ill Consequences of this Doctrine are sufficiently plain, both from Reason and Experience (though such Men happen not to perceive them) the same Rules of Charity forbid us, when the Subject falls in our way, to be silent concerning them, or suffer Men to think, that those, who exclude good Works from being any ways instrumental towards Justifying a Sinner, are guilty only of an Innocent Mistake, which reacheth no farther than bare *Speculation*. A

2d, Inference is, That if a Spirit of Charity shall cover a multitude of Sins; then may we assure our selves, that the contrary Temper, a Spirit of Hatred, Malignity, and Ill Will, shall cover a multitude of Virtues; i. e. They shall not be reckon'd as Virtues to him who possesseth them. Neither God nor Man shall regard them as such, if Charity doth not Crown them. Charity covers many Sins, because it is so noble and so excellent a Virtue: what Virtue then, beyond this, can there be found of value sufficient to cover the Sin of Uncharitableness?

3dly, From the Promise made in the Text, We may take an occasion to reflect on the wondrous Goodness and Condescension of God. He hath a right to all the highest Instances and Degrees of Virtue that it is possible for us to abound in; and when we have practis'd them to the utmost, we have done but what we were strictly oblig'd to do: And yet so far he is pleas'd to abate of this Right, as to accept the Performance of one Great Duty in lieu of the Omission of many Others. An Act of Grace and Kindness, which is enhans'd to us, by considering, that Reason never did, or could make this known to the Heathen World; although the Gospel hath now reveal'd it to us. Nay, remarkable it is (as I observ'd to you before) that this Great Duty, which is to compensate as it were, for all our Failings, is the most pleasant and delightful Employment that belongs to us; the most agreeable to our Nature, and the most useful to our Fellow-Creatures. Let us not complain, therefore, of the strictness of the Rule we are to walk by, and of the Hardships, which in our Christian Warfare we are to undergo. The Rule is strict indeed: but then, there are great Helps and Assistances, enabling us to live up to it; so great Abatements and Allowances (we see) are made to us at last, if we do not

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There are indeed Difficulties to be undergone: But, surely, the *Labour of Love* is none of them. That, as it makes a kind of Atonement to God for all the Faults we commit, so doth it make an Amends to us for all the Troubles we are at, in every other part of our Duty; it gives an easiness to that Yoke, and a Lightness to that Burthen which is laid upon us.

4thly and Lastly, If the Doctrine laid down be good, then have we in it the plainest and most quickning Motive in the World to the Exercise of this great Duty of Charity; such a motive, as exceeds the united Force of all the Arguments which ever were offer'd in this Case; and of whose Power if a Man can be insensible, all other Motives will doubtless be lost upon him. The wise Son of *Syrach* thought he had made a reasonable Plea for Charity, when he said, *Lay up thy Treasure according to the Commandments of the most High, and it shall bring thee more Profit than Gold. Shut up Alms in thy Storehouses, and it shall deliver thee from all Affliction; It shall fight for thee against thine Enemies better than a mighty Shield, or a strong Spear.* Ecclus. xxix. 11, 12, 13. But how flat, and cold, and unmoving is all this, when compar'd with the Life and Energy that is in those few Words; — *It shall cover the multitude of Sins!*

This Motive indeed hath been carried too far, and abus'd to ill Purposes by Men of another Communion, who, by the help of it, have made the most impure and profligate Wretches hope for a general Forgiveness of all their Sins, so they were but liberal enough to the Church in their Wills; and settled such a Revenue upon it, as should make a good number of Fathers think it worth their while to say daily *Masses* for the Soul of the Departed. And how gross a way soever this is of Expounding the Text, it hath proved a very gainful one to those who made use of it; For perhaps half the Wealth of the Church of *Rome* may justly be attributed to it. A strong Persuasion of the Truth of this Exposition seems to have been one of the chief Foundation stones, upon which a great Part of her charitable Buildings have been Erected.

The Ministers of the Reform'd Church, indeed, dare not go so far in inviting you to Works of Charity and Mercy: But *this* they dare, and do affirm, That a true Principle of Charity, is that Qualification of Mind, which of all others is most grateful and acceptable to God; and such as, at the Day of final Retribution, He will have a particular Regard to, so as to make no severe Scrutiny into that Man's Faults and Failings, who hath eminently guided his Life and Practice by it. And this they think sufficiently intimated in our Saviour's Account of the Process of that Day; where the only Head of Enquiry he mentions, is, what good and charitable deeds we have done to any of our poor Brethren? Which implies thus much at least; That *this* will be the chief Point upon which we shall be examin'd; and that our Acquittal, as to Neglects in other Parts of our Duty, will depend very much upon our being able to give a good Answer to it.

And, I hope, this Assurance it self is a sufficient Encouragement to the Practice of Charity, without our needing to strain the Words of the Text to so Extravagant a Sense, as no wise Man can believe that we *ought*, and no good Man would wish that we *might*, take them in.

V. There

V. There is indeed one farther Sense of the Words, than hath yet been mention'd; to which they may, however, be innocently and truly extended. They have been hitherto consider'd only as containing a Particular Promise to Particular Persons: They may be understood also with regard to those Blessings which Publick Charities procure on Publick States and Communities. For it is true also, that Acts of Charity shall Cover the Sins of Cities and Kingdoms, as well as those of Private Men, if Cities and Kingdoms do generally agree to perform them.

Our Fore-fathers, we may presume, were of This Opinion; and were powerfully influenc'd by it, towards setting forward those Charitable Designs, which are a Lasting Honour and Advantage to this City and Kingdom. They could not but see, that the Wealth of the Church, tho' it was really grown too Great, and was by some Rich Lazy Orders in it scandalously employ'd; yet had been retrench'd, on this Account, beyond what needed; and had not been apply'd afterwards to any Religious, or Publick Use: but was squander'd away for the most part upon Favorites, and upon such as fell in with the Honest Zeal of our first Reformers, not out of any Principle of Conscience, but the mere Design of enriching Themselves out of the Plunder of Abbies and Monasteries. The sense of this, d'ubtless, affected deeply the Good and Pious Men of those Times; and made them very Earnest and Active to procure some part of these Church Spoils to be set aside for Charitable Uses: that Retribution, as it were, might, by This Means, be made to God, of what had been torn away in too Large Proportions from his Worship and Service: To speak plainly ——— that by a true Spirit of Charity those Sins might be Cover'd, which a Spirit of Lust and Avarice, under the pretence of Reforming the Abuses of Charity, had caus'd!

And these Endeavours of theirs God bless'd so wonderfully, that some Millions of Money were, in a few Years, contributed towards erecting and endowing Here, and in other Parts of our Country, Hospitals and Houses of Charity, This sufficiently baffled the Calumnies, and stopp'd the Mouths of Our Adversaries of the Church of Rome; who cry'd us down, as Men that were Reforming away Good Works, and turning all Religion into a Notional Faith. How Other Protestant Countries have free Themselves from that Imputation, I am not able to say: sure I am, Ours clear'd it self so well from it, as to turn the Edge of the Objection back upon the Church of Rome it self. For, upon a Fair and Impartial Computation, it appears, that there were Greater Expences upon Publick Works of Charity (such, I mean, as we are at present discoursing of) in Sixty Years after the Reformation, than had been in Five times that Number of Years, while Popery stood: some have added, ——— than there were from the Conquest down to King *Edward the Sixth*; that Good and Excellent Prince, the Great Promoter and Encourager of these Works; and Who is not to be mention'd, without particular Honour, in This House, which acknowledges him for Her Pious and Munificent Founder.

I cannot but observe to You, here, that it was the Ruling Part of This Great City, with a Good Bishop of *London*, and Martyr for the Protestant Religion, at the Head of them, that by their United Application stirr'd up that Young Prince to undertake so publick spirited a Design. And it is natural for me also at the same Time to wish, that That Honourable Body may thus heartily always continue to join Their Endeavours and Interests with Those of Their Right Reverend Diocesan, in promoting Publick Charities, and Publick Blessings of any kind, either in Church, or State.

Indeed, it must always be remember'd, to the Honour of this Great Body, That,

That, as Her Foundations of Charity are larger, for ought I can find, than those of any Other City in the Christian World; so they were All rais'd and endow'd, either directly by Her Own Members; or, if by Other Hands, yet at Her earnest and importunate Suit: So that the Fabricks, and Revenues of this Kind, that belong to Her, are not only (as in Other Parts) the Useful Ornaments of the Place, but so many standing Monuments also of the Great Piety, and Unparallel'd Bounty of Her Ancestors; who solicited the Cause of the Poor and the Infirm, the Lame and Wounded, the Vagrant and Lunatick, with such a particular Industry and Zeal, as had those Great and Blessed Effects, which we at This Day see and feel. A Zeal, never to be forgotten by Men! and which, we hope, God also will never forget! but, when he comes down to Visit this City for the many ill Effects of Wealth misapply'd, will, for the sake of it, Visit in Mercy; and consider the *Multitude of Her Charities* as well as That of Her *Sins*; Graciously allowing the One to be in some Measure a Cover to the Other!

But I have not Room to speak severally of All the Great Benefactions with which She abounds; and am call'd upon, by the Occasion of this Present Assembly, to say somewhat more particularly of those of This Place.

I think it, by no means, a fit and decent thing to vye Charities, and to tread the Reputation of One upon the Ruines of another: This is, for the sake of Charity to forget the True Character, and Essential Properties of it; which are, as St. Paul tells us, *to be kind, and not to envy, not to vaunt it self, or be puffed up, not to behave it self unseemly.* 1 Cor. 13. 4, 5: However, This, I think, I may say, with Modesty and Truth, to the Advantage of That Charity to which we belong; That, though the Bottom of Wealth, it stands upon, be not so Large as that of some Others, yet is it in the Design of it so Comprehensive and Full, as not any where, I think, to be parallel'd.

Here are Supplies to Outward Want and Necessity Liberally imparted; The Poor and Fatherless, not only taken Care of, but so bred up, as to be useful to the Common-wealth, and perhaps to take care of many Others. Here Idle, and Useless, (and therefore Necessitous) Persons are taught the Best of Lessons, Labour; inur'd to it, and made acquainted with it; and then sent out with such a Stock of Industry, as will do them more real Service than any Other Kind of Benefaction; if They will but make use of it, and improve it.

Here, Loose Men and Women are reduc'd by wholesome Discipline, and Vagrants by Confinement: Punishment it self is made an Instrument of Mercy and Goodness; and, as Meat is provided for the Belly, so is there a Rod for the Back of Fools. These Particular Instances of Charity deserve to be enlarg'd on: It is an Argument that hath not yet been handled in its utmost Extent, and may perhaps ask your Patience, on some Other Occasion: but the Time to which I am confin'd, is now almost run out; and there are yet Other Instances behind, to be insisted on. For

Here, not only External Necessities are relieved, but Inward Wants also are supply'd; not Ill Manners only are outwardly corrected, but Ill Dispositions

positions also are better'd, Ill Minds reform'd. And Every single Instance in the kind is not confin'd to the Person who receives the Benefit, but is a real Service to the whole Community. It puts a stop to a spreading Plague; nay, it gets Ground upon it, by making Those, who have had the Infection, turn Physicians to Others, by their Example, and Future Good Manners.

Nay, Here, Men recover their Understandings as well as their Vertues; that is, they recover their Very Selves; and are made once again Members of the Rational Creation, able to See and Know their Duty, and to Guide themselves by that Knowledge of it; to pay their Reasonable Service to God, and to maintain a Civil and courteous with Men.

And on this Occasion, that Worthy and Learned Person deserves a particular, and Grateful mention who hath, by his Eminent Skill, assisted the Hospital to be Charitable in This Way, to much greater Numbers of Lunatics, than have been known to be Cur'd in Former Times.

So that this Great Receptacle of Miserable Objects of every kind, seems to be like that Medicinal Pool at Bethesda, where there were Vertues proper for every Malady, all Infirmities were equally heal'd, in Those, who had the Happiness to get into it. I can carry the Parallel no farther, I thank God, — For the Prudence and Vigilance of its Governours, as it hath, so, I question not, always will take Care that (Contrary to what happen'd to the Impotent Man in That Story) They who have most need of the Pool, shall ever have the Happiness to get first into it. Impartiality is the Soil of Mercy, as well as Justice; and adds Farther Degrees of Use and Beauty to the most Useful and Beautiful Thing in the World.

To give You, therefore, in little the true Character of This Great Benefaction. As Charity comprizeth almost all Kinds of Vertues; so doth This Foundation take in all sorts of Charities! But tho' all the Chief kinds of Beneficence are here pursu'd, yet many Miserable Objects in Each Kind are not possible to be reach'd with the present Stock of Charity, which belongs either to This Hospital, or to all Her Other Rivals in This Labour of Love! God open the Hands of the Rich and direct the Hearts of the Merciful, to build upon the Foundation Their Forefathers have laid; and to supply what is wanting, to compleat Their Designs! Approve Themselves thus, the true Heirs of Their Piety and Bounty, as well as of their Wealth! Else, these Great Buildings and Endowments of a former Age, like the Vicious Acts and Achievements of the First Founders of Noble Families, will become a Reproach, rather than be an Honour, to a Degenerate and Worthless Posterity.

Consider with Your selves, how God hath blest this City for the sake of the mighty Works that have been done in Her; I say, for the sake of them. — For let no Man carry his Thoughts back to that Time, when these Good Designs were first on foot, and He shall find, from Thence the Rise and Growth of this City in Trade, Wealth, Interest, and Greatness, is precisely to be dated.

May it grow on, in the same Proportion! and by the same Means also! That may there still be found such a Number of Charitable Persons in it, as will continue the Character which hath hitherto belong'd to it; and, by That means, secure the Continuation of God's Blessings upon it. May Charity go on to have it's Perpetual Work; not living merely upon the Old Stock, not continuing as a Stay; but growing and Increasing still, as the Necessities of Some Men increase, and the Ability of Others to Relieve them! And thus spreading it self to a wider Compass, will assuredly procure a Greater Share of God's Mercies, and Cover a greater Multitude of our Sins.

That This may be the Case, the Good and Merciful God grant, through the Great Steward and Dispenser of his Mercies, Christ the Righteous. To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be ascrib'd, as most due, all Honour, Adoration, and Praise; Now, and Ever! Amen.

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